



EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE NORTHWEST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

October 25, 2010 and January 10, 2011

Project Number: 3011425

Address: 10507 Aurora Avenue N

Applicant: Scott Starr, SMR Architects for DESC

Date of First EDG Meeting: Monday, October 25, 2010

Board Members Present: Bill Singer (Chair)
Mark Brands
Mike DeLilla
Jean Morgan
Ted Panton

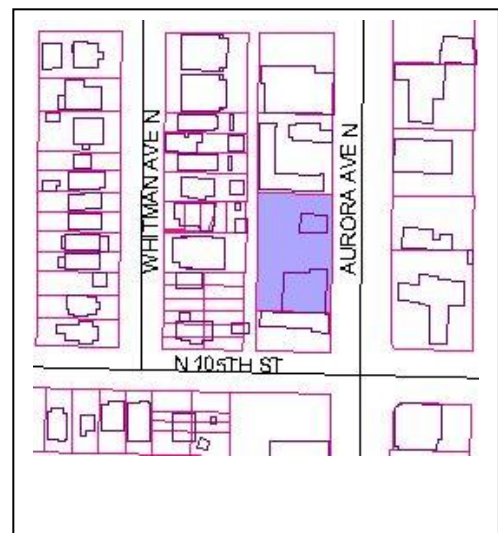
DPD Staff Present: Michael Dorcy

SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: C1-40'

Nearby Zones: (North) C1-40'
(South) C1-40'
(East) C1-40'
(West) L-2

Lot Area: The site is rectangular in shape ,
relatively flat and totals 19,976 square
feet in size.



Current Development:	The site is currently occupied by a commercial building housing a restaurant (Cindy's) and an accessory, surface parking lot.
Access:	Current access is off both the alley and from Aurora Avenue N.
Surrounding Development:	Development along both sides of Aurora Avenue N. primarily consists of single story commercial buildings. Across the alley, to the west of the site, there is mostly low-scale multifamily development which buffers single-family development that begins a half of a block to the west.
ECAs:	There are no identified environmentally critical areas on or abutting the site.
Neighborhood Character:	The site and area are part of the Aurora-Licton Springs Urban Village. The site faces onto Aurora Avenue N., a busy arterial, also known as Pacific Highway 99, a State of Washington Highway that connects with the Canadian border to the north and to state highways 99 in Oregon and California that connect to Mexico. Development along Aurora Avenue N. in Seattle is that of "strip" commercial development, situated to serve customers arriving in vehicles. The pattern of development is characterized by discontinuous, low-slung lodging and commercial buildings perched as islands on seas of asphalt-paved parking lots easily accessed by vehicles from the highway. A notable break in this pattern occurs not too far to the north of the site where a large cemetery complex lies on either side of Aurora Avenue N. and provides a moment of quietude before the noise of the strip resumes.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes a four-story mixed use building containing 87 residential units above a ground floor containing approximately 5,000 square feet of retail and administrative office space. Additional common spaces for the residents of the building and parking will be supplied within the western portion of the ground floor which will be shared with parking for approximately 21 vehicles.

EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE MEETING: October 25, 2010
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DESIGN PRESENTATION

After a few comments from Bill Hobson, Director, Downtown Emergency Services Center, Scott Starr of SMR Architects delivered the bulk of the presentation made to the Board and members of the public attending the meeting. A single massing scheme was presented by the applicant. It was a C-shaped building that held close to the property line along Aurora and provided ground-level outdoor open space at the center of the building where it fronted the alley. The building

was held back from both the north and south property lines. The four story mixed use building would contain 87 residential units on the top three floors while the ground floor would contain approximately 5,000 square feet of retail and administrative office space adjacent to Aurora Avenue N. Common residential amenity spaces, mechanical spaces and parking would be located on the ground floor facing the alley. Overall, the structure would contain approximately 60,000 square feet of space, including the parking and mechanical spaces. The applicant noted a departure would be requested from SMC 23.47A. 024, the Code provision that requires an outdoor residential amenity space equivalent to 5 percent of the proposed area given to residential use. The applicant proposed providing half of this required amenity space as indoor common area rather than as outdoor space.

One departure from development standards was identified by the applicant. This was a request to allow approximately one half of the required residential amenity space to be located inside the building as a first floor common recreational area. SMC 23.47A. 024 would require that the 5 percent of the gross floor area in residential use to be designated as residential amenity space not be enclosed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Approximately 16 members of the public attended this Early Design Review meeting. The following comments, issues and concerns were raised:

- Noted that the proposal should pay attention to the nature of the alley, allowing for greenery, providing for garbage storage within, and eliminating potential hiding spaces.
- Stated that the project should provide any outdoor spaces required by code and address the hydrological demands and the security demands of the site; security lighting should be provided along the alley but carefully so as not to be disruptive to neighboring residences.
- Preferred parking access from the alley, but noted that safe and adequate passages must be provided through the building for access to commercial square footage along Aurora.
- Opposed the location of the enclosed courtyard as it was not an asset to the broader community.
- Encouraged the opportunity to develop the south façade in concert with the existing building located to the south of the site and facing onto 105th Street; encouraged the opportunity to provide a building of durable materials that would be a real asset to the community.
 - Showed concern with the lack of detail in the presentation and the lack of real massing alternatives for the site; also showed concern that the amount of community space, whether inside or outside would be inadequate for the number of residents proposed.

PRIORITIES & BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

After visiting the site, considering the analysis of the site and context provided by the proponents, and hearing public comment, the Design Review Board members provided the following siting and design guidance. The Board identified the Citywide Design Guidelines & Neighborhood specific guidelines (as applicable) of highest priority for this project.

A. Site Planning

A-1 Responding to Site Characteristics. The siting of buildings should respond to specific site conditions and opportunities such as non-rectangular lots, location on prominent intersections, unusual topography, significant vegetation and views or other natural features.

A-2 Streetscape Compatibility. The siting of buildings should acknowledge and reinforce the existing desirable spatial characteristics of the right-of-way.

It was thought by some of the Board members that even though this site was on a busy, car-dominated arterial, there were elements of the “strip” that were “almost alright” and which might provide clues for compatible design.

A-3 Entrances Visible from the Street. Entries should be clearly identifiable and visible from the street.

A-4 Human Activity. New development should be sited and designed to encourage human activity on the street.

A-6 Transition Between Residence and Street. For residential projects, the space between the building and the sidewalk should provide security and privacy for residents and encourage social interaction among residents and neighbors.

A-7 Residential Open Space. Residential projects should be sited to maximize opportunities for creating usable, attractive, well-integrated open space.

This was seen as one of the primary challenges for the project, providing amenity spaces that addressed programmatic needs while also providing comfort and security for the residents.

A-8 Parking and Vehicle Access. Siting should minimize the impact of automobile parking and driveways on the pedestrian environment, adjacent properties, and pedestrian safety.

The security of the garage and safe and attractive passage from parking to the street would be key issues for the design refinement of the proposal.

B. Height, Bulk and Scale

- B-1 Height, Bulk, and Scale Compatibility.** Projects should be compatible with the scale of development anticipated by the applicable Land Use Policies for the surrounding area and should be sited and designed to provide a sensitive transition to near-by, less intensive zones. Projects on zone edges should be developed in a manner that creates a step in perceived height, bulk, and scale between anticipated development potential of the adjacent zones.

The Board was generally agreed that the best strategy was shifting the bulk of the building to Aurora Avenue N. while stepping back from the alley and the neighboring structures along the alley and from the structures to the north and to the south. The Board was not satisfied, however, that the presentation had offered any real alternatives to the reversed “C” scheme that opened to the alley. The Board requested that the design team return with a more fully developed and convincing presentation of the “C” scheme together with at least one other scheme that would be worthy of investigation and not just a “strawman” design.

C. Architectural Elements and Materials

- C-1 Architectural Context.** New buildings proposed for existing neighborhoods with a well-defined and desirable character should be compatible with or complement the architectural character and siting pattern of neighboring buildings.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed (see A-2 above) that lacking a truly “well-defined and desirable character,” nevertheless taking something away from a more intense analysis of the “strip” context would be a useful exercise. It was suggested by one Board member that a “quirky” public art component might be an appropriate response to that analysis.

- C-2 Architectural Concept and Consistency.** Building design elements, details and massing should create a well-proportioned and unified building form and exhibit an overall architectural concept. Buildings should exhibit form and features identifying the functions within the building. In general, the roofline or top of the structure should be clearly distinguished from its facade walls.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting the Board discussed the need to create a unified building that provided a synthesis between the podium, commercial store-front base and the residential building above.

- C-3 Human Scale.** The design of new buildings should incorporate architectural features, elements, and details to achieve a good human scale.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted that the questions of scale were matters of concern along both the alley and the street as well as the facades that faced the properties to the north and south of the site. Issues of scale were particularly related to discussions of safety, particularly along the alley.

- C-4 Exterior Finish Materials.** Building exteriors should be constructed of durable and maintainable materials that are attractive even when viewed up close. Materials that have texture, pattern, or lend themselves to a high quality of detailing are encouraged.

D. Pedestrian Environment

- D-1 Pedestrian Open Spaces and Entrances.** Convenient and attractive access to the building's entry should be provided. To ensure comfort and security, paths and entry areas should be sufficiently lighted and entry areas should be protected from the weather. Opportunities for creating lively, pedestrian-oriented open space should be considered.

As noted in earlier discussions, the Board indicated particular concern regarding the comfort and security of pathways leading from the parking areas to the commercial spaces that occupied the Aurora Avenue N. façade of the building.

- D-5 Visual Impacts of Parking Structures.** The visibility of all at-grade parking structures or accessory parking garages should be minimized. The parking portion of a structure should be architecturally compatible with the rest of the structure and streetscape. Open parking spaces and carports should be screened from the street and adjacent properties.

In choosing this Guideline as one of highest priority, the Board expressed concern for the appearance of the parking garage and its entries from the alley and from across the alley and requested to see landscaping elements that would green the alley-level façade.

- D-6 Screening of Dumpsters, Utilities, and Service Areas.** Building sites should locate service elements like trash dumpsters, loading docks and mechanical equipment away from the street front where possible. When elements such as dumpsters, utility meters, mechanical units and service areas cannot be located away from the street front, they should be situated and screened from view and should not be located in the pedestrian right-of-way.

Screening these service elements from the alley was deemed equally important by the Board.

- D-7 Personal Safety and Security.** Project design should consider opportunities for enhancing personal safety and security in the environment under review.

In light of extensive public comments and discussion regarding the safety of the alley, the Board regarded this Guideline to be of particular importance to the design.

- D-8 Treatment of Alleys.** The design of alley entrances should enhance the pedestrian street front.

This should be considered in light of the comments attached to Guideline D-5 above.

- D-9 Commercial Signage.** Signs should add interest to the street front environment and should be appropriate for the scale and character desired in the area.

The commercial signage should be bold and considered a major component of the overall design.

- D-10 Commercial Lighting.** Appropriate levels of lighting should be provided in order to promote visual interest and a sense of security for people in commercial districts during evening hours. Lighting may be provided by incorporation into the building façade, the underside of overhead weather protection, on and around street furniture, in merchandising display windows, in landscaped areas, and/or on signage.

The lighting should be design to enhance the ground plane.

- D-11 Commercial Transparency.** Commercial storefronts should be transparent, allowing for a direct visual connection between pedestrians on the sidewalk and the activities occurring on the interior of a building. Blank walls should be avoided.

- D-12 Residential Entries and Transitions.** For residential projects in commercial zones, the space between the residential entry and the sidewalk should provide security and privacy for residents and a visually interesting street front for pedestrians. Residential buildings should enhance the character of the streetscape with small gardens, stoops and other elements that work to create a transition between the public sidewalk and private entry.

Likewise, on the alley side the ground floor should be enhanced with vegetative walls.

E. Landscaping

E-1 Landscaping to Reinforce Design Continuity with Adjacent Sites. Where possible, and where there is not another overriding concern, landscaping should reinforce the character of neighboring properties and abutting streetscape.

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES

The Board's recommendation on the requested departure(s) will be based upon the departure's potential to help the project better meet these design guideline priorities and achieve a better overall design than could be achieved without the departure(s). The Board's recommendation will be reserved until the final Board meeting.

At the time of the first Early Design Guidance meeting, the following departure was requested:

The Code requires that the residential amenity space, based upon of formula of 5 percent of the gross floor area in residential use, be provided outside the building. **(SMC 23.47A.024B)**: The applicant proposes that half the required amenity space be located outside the building. The Board indicated they would be favorable toward the departure providing the applicant provides more information regarding the actual design of the spaces and responds to the Board's other requests for a fuller exploration of alternatives and to the Guidelines noted to be of highest priority for the project.

BOARD DIRECTION

At the conclusion of the First EDG meeting, the Board recommended the project should return to the Board for an additional EDG meeting. The Board would like to see at that time a genuine alternative scheme or schemes to those which had been shown at the October 25, 2010 meeting as the preferred scheme. At the next meeting the Board would also like to see a much more fully developed and detailed explanation of the basic massing scheme shown the Board as the preferred alternative, one that would clarify the relationship between the open space next to the alley and the alley itself as well as the relationship to internal spaces and functions, including human service areas, internal amenity spaces and the proposed parking. Ground-level perspectives as well as plans would be of use here. Additionally, graphics should be supplied to clearly address the concerns expressed by the Board and the public. These would include: issues of protection, security and safety; pathways, including those designed for users of the parking and the commercial and clinical spaces intended to be accessed from entrances addressed to Aurora Avenue N.; fencing, landscaping, doorways, garage entries and doors—their design and intended functions.

2nd EDG Meeting-January 10, 2011

Board Members Present: Bill Singer, Chair
Mark Brands
Mike DeLilla

Board Members Absent: Jean Morgan
Ted Panton

DPD Staff Present: Michael Dorcy

Architect's Presentation

Following greetings for the Board Chair and introductions of the Board members, the architect began by recalling two areas of concern that had prompted the Board to request a second early design guidance session. First, the Board had suggested that a more thorough site analysis and contextual analysis of the Aurora Avenue corridor might yield some concrete clues for directions in design development. Secondly, the Board had felt at the first presentation that a lack of distinct massing alternatives had hindered the Board's ability to give specific advice regarding the proposal's best fit on the site and best fit within the neighborhood. The analysis presented two distinctive Aurora environments. One was a pedestrian and smaller scale commercial area defined as encompassing about one half block on either side of Aurora, beginning at Green Lake north to about 110th Street (which include the proposal site). The second, larger scale commercial area began about 115th and ran north to the city limits. It was constituted by a swath of commercial uses that extended east and west further from Aurora and characterized by some larger, "box" structures (Home Depot and Lowe's, for instance. Between the two, different scale commercial strips was a sizeable intervening green sward provided by the Evergreen-Washelli cemeteries arrayed on either side of Aurora for perhaps a five block extent. The pedestrian/smaller scale commercial strip that comprised the immediate context for the proposed structure was shown to consist of a number of fairly plain, lower, horizontally-stretched structures, set back from the street with parking available just off Aurora. A distinctive characteristic of these sites was a recurring motif of colorful, neon-enhanced signs (primarily for signaling lodging availability) set on poles at the street's edge.

Three schemes or massing models were then presented. Schemes B and C were variants of the massing shown at the first EDG meeting, each showing a continuous wall pushed to Aurora Avenue N. and with a courtyard opening at the alley. The courtyard in scheme B was shallower and wider than that proposed for scheme C which was narrower and deeper. Parking in each scheme was from the alley. The ground floor abutting the Aurora sidewalk was divided between two commercial spaces with a residential entry at the center of structure. Scheme A had a similar arrangement along the Aurora side but presented a solid wall (broken only by entries for parking access and utility functions at grade) with two stories of residential units along the alley. Interior to the alley wall was a courtyard. Three stories of residential units above ground floor commercial and circulation space addressing Aurora Avenue N. contributed to configuring a

structure that stepped down a floor at the alley side in deference to the residential zone to the west.

Public Comment

Three individuals affixed their names to the sign-in sheet provided at the meeting although members of the public and those who commented on the project numbered more. Among the public comments were the following observations:

- The opening of the garage entries of the proposed structures were in conflict with parking orientations across the alley and should be re-aligned on the proposal to deal with possible conflicts;
- Sounds associated with garage doors on proposed structure should be muted in deference to neighbors across the alley;
- The present restaurant on site was one of the neighborhood's only gathering spots, and if a remnant of that eating place or another is to be maintained within the new structure, there ought to be outside places along the sidewalk for creation of a true neighborhood space;
- Because of the constant noise levels due to traffic along Aurora, outdoor seating would be disastrous;
- The number of parking spaces proposed would be inadequate for successful commercial spaces within the structure;
- Access from the proposed internal parking to only one of the commercial spaces would prove troublesome;
- Access to the roof deck as proposed in Scheme A should limited hours; green screens along the alley would be a fine contribution to neighborliness.

Board's Deliberations

After thanking the applicants for giving them some real alternatives to look at, the Board members expressed their agreement that Scheme A was the direction to proceed in, with the following caveats:

- The Aurora façade needed enlivening refinements, including the discovery of how to incorporate the "googie" sign elements (colors, forms) into the design in ways that were neither perfunctory or forced.
- It seemed clear that the awkwardness of the lack of a clear pathway from the parking to one or other of the main commercial spaces along Aurora should simply be solved by abutting or connecting the commercial spaces. This could best be achieved by doing away with the central location of the residential entry. Moving the residential entry to one side or the other would not only obviate the problem of no direct parking access but would provide opportunities for enlivening the Aurora Avenue N. façade.

It was the Board's recommendation that, with the guidance above and with the guidance given in indicating those guidelines that were of particular importance for the success of the project at

the first early design guidance meeting, the applicant and design team should proceed to design development and application for a Master Use Permit.

Development Standard Departures

At the first Early Design Guidance meeting, the design team had indicated that they would request a departure from SMC 23.47A.024B which requires that the 5 percent of the gross floor area in residential use to be designated as residential amenity space not be enclosed. At that time the applicant was proposing that half the required amenity space be located outside the building. At the second EDG the design team indicated that, given Scheme A, such a departure would not be needed. There were no other departures from development standards requested by the applicant. In discussing incorporating elements of the existing Cindy's sign or other "googie" sign elements into the Aurora Avenue façade or landscaping, however, the Board members indicated a willingness to consider granting departures from requirements for sign standards in the Land Use Code should such be needed to incorporate or capture something striking into the design that otherwise not be permitted by the standards.